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ABSTRACT

Current economic conditions have created additional sources of stress in the correctional setting. Often, recreation professionals employed in these settings also add to inmate stress. One of the major factors limiting stress management in correctional settings is a lack of understanding of the value, importance, and perceived freedom, of leisure. Inmates' perceived freedom of leisure includes their perceptions of: (1) leisure competence; (2) leisure control; (3) satisfaction of leisure needs; (4) depth of leisure involvement; and (5) barriers to leisure involvement. Negative leisure freedom in each of these aspects relates to stress, but all aspects of negative stress can be changed into positive stress. The Continuum of Perceived Leisure Freedom shows that inmates should be moved from: (1) competence in few leisure activities to competence in many; (2) low leisure control to high leisure control; (3) few satisfied leisure needs to many satisfied leisure needs; (4) little depth of leisure involvement to indepth involvement; and (5) a reduction in leisure barriers. Only after the inmate has advanced along the continuum from a negative perception of leisure freedom to a positive perception of leisure freedom can stress be reduced. (JMK)

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STRESS MANAGEMENT IN CORRECTIONAL RECREATION

by

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Current economic conditions have created additional stressors in the correctional setting. Due to a lack of government funds, coupled with contemporary social attitudes and punitive legislation, correctional institutions have encountered limited staffing, deleted rehabilitation programs, overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and sparse equipment. These factors as well as an antiquated philosophy of recreation have added to inmate stress.

Stress within this milieu is unique because of its devastating impact and often violent outcome. It is difficult for those who have not personally experienced the emotion and strain of daily life in a correctional institution to appreciate the finality of the "electric gate closing behind you" (Speckman, 1981). Furthermore, freedom is frequently referred to as a God given right in a democratic society. But the incarcerated have had the right curtailed for a court-determined period of time.

Often times, recreation professionals employed in correctional settings also add to inmate stress. One of the major factors limiting adequate stress management in correctional settings is a lack of understanding concerning the value and importance of leisure as well as a lack of understanding concerning perceived freedom of leisure.

Perceived freedom of leisure includes the following aspects: (1) perceived leisure competence; (2) perceived leisure control; (3) perceived satisfaction of leisure needs; (4) perceived depth of leisure involvement; and (5) perceived barriers to leisure involvement. Through a discussion of each aspect, it will be noted how negative leisure freedom relates to stress and how each aspect of stress can be changed into positive stress.

Iso-Ahola (1980) and Bregha (1980) noted that the quality of the leisure experience can be ameliorated by enhancing a person's perceived freedom. But in the correctional setting, perceived leisure freedom is almost nonexistent.

Total perceived leisure freedom would include: (1) leisure competence, (2) leisure control, (3) satisfaction of leisure needs, (4) leisure involvement, and (5) few barriers (Ellis & Witt, 1983). Prison affords few opportunities for leisure freedom and often times produces insurmountable barriers to that freedom.

Inmates may perceive themselves as having leisure competence in few areas. For example, inmates have skill in only basketball and thus do not participate in other activities offered. Lack of competence only leads to stress.

Perceived leisure freedom is also curtailed due to inmates having little or no control over their lives. Not only are they told when to eat, sleep, and bathe, but also when to play. Few choices exist as to how they conduct their lives, including choices of leisure. Again, lack of control adds to increased stress.

Often times, inmates' leisure needs are not satisfied. Programs may be offered that are based upon competence of the recreation personnel. Inmates' needs may not even be considered. Harless (1982) conducted a survey to gain knowledge of present programs through correctional facilities. Athletic programs (softball, handball, basketball, boxing, etc.) were the most frequently mentioned activities. Few facilities offered arts and crafts or music. Again, if an inmate is not competent in activities offered, s/he probably will not participate and thus her/his needs will not be satisfied. Stress increases.

Correctional personnel often attempt to enhance inmates' depth of leisure involvement; but tokenism often results. For instance, an inmate council may be formed to aid in the development of recreation programs. Council members determine activities to be implemented. Seldom are the council's ideas implemented. Nonimplementation excuses range the gamut--little money, over-worked staff, too little time, and/or few volunteers. Inmates may be appeased for a short period but depth of involvement quickly decreases and stress increases.

Depth of involvement may also be curtailed due to extrinsic motivators.

Inmates may participate in activities for the rewards offered--refreshment, trophies, weekend pass. If an inmate participates due to extrinsic motivators instead of intrinsic motivators, the depth of involvement will be shallow, especially if the rewards are not provided immediately. Playfulness, including spontaneity and joy, decreases. Again, recreation is adding to inmate stress.

Personal and environmental barriers also seem insurmountable in gaining leisure freedom. Inmates have little money to spend on leisure. Even if financial constraints were removed, inmates would have no place to spend the money other than on gambling or at the canteen. Often times, facilities and equipment are inadequate and few programs are offered.

Many inmate possess poor social skills, again adding to the barriers. They feel that fighting is an acceptable way to vent anger over a game rule infraction. Improper social skills will not be accepted on "the street" and thus barriers increase, adding to stress.

As recreators, we must be able to determine the amount of inmates' leisure freedom. Once leisure freedom is known, then we will be aware of what areas need improvement in order to reduce stress. Common instruments (McKechnie, 1975; McCall, 1977) used to determine activities offered may not be adequate. If one is interested in past, present, or future inmate activity desires, the instruments are acceptable. But thorough leisure assessments must be conducted in order to determine leisure freedom so that stress may be reduced.

In order to assure a quality leisure program, we must first be knowledgeable of inmates' perceived leisure functioning. Assessments must be conducted and programs must be based on that assessment. The Continuum of Perceived Leisure Freedom (Figure 1) must move the inmate from (1) competence in few leisure activities to competence in many; (2) low leisure control to high leisure control; (3) few satisfied leisure needs to many satisfied needs; (4) little

depth of leisure involvement to indepth involvement; and (5) a reduction in leisure barriers. Only after the inmate has advanced along the continuum from a negative perceived leisure freedom to a positive perceived leisure freedom can stress be reduced.

Assessment based on this continuum will help elevate the status of the correctional recreation profession from personnel that merely plan activities to the status of a highly respected and essential component of life satisfaction. After all, our ultimate goal is life satisfaction for all. We must think in terms of what is possible and not just what is.

Figure 1. CONTINUUM OF PERCEIVED LEISURE FREEDOM

Negative Perceived Leisure Freedom	Positive Perceived Leisure Freedom
—	+
Competent in no leisure activities.	Competent in many leisure activities
No leisure control.	Leisure control
Leisure needs not satisfied.	Leisure needs satisfied
No depth of leisure involvement.	Indepth leisure involvement
Many barriers to leisure.	Few barriers to leisure

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